

teacher for a child is a loving parent, and the decision whether to require uniforms should be made by parents, by teachers, by local schools. But if they want to do it, we want to help them understand how it can be done. That's why today I signed a directive instructing the Secretary of Education to distribute a new manual on school uniforms to every school district in the Nation. Rather than telling schools what to do, we are providing a roadmap for setting up the school uniform policy for schools who choose to start one.

Every one of us has an obligation to work together, to give our children freedom from fear and the freedom to learn. If we act together, we can give them the chance to make the most of their young lives and to build better futures.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 8:15 p.m. on February 23 at the Sheraton Miramar Hotel for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on February 24.

Remarks Prior to a Roundtable Discussion on School Uniforms in Long Beach, California

February 24, 1996

Thank you very much, Mr. Cohn. I am here mostly to listen to all of you. And I thank you for taking a little time to meet with me.

I have spent an enormous amount of my time in the last 18 years now since I became a Governor of my State in 1986-'78—in public schools. And I devoted a lot of time as President to how we can improve education through higher standards and higher expectations, get higher performance. It is obvious that unless the school is a safe, disciplined, drug-free learning environment it's impossible for learning to occur.

And what we have tried to do at the national level is to encourage all kinds of grass-roots reforms and to make it possible for people to do what they think is appropriate in their schools; not to tell schools how they should go about improving learning and improving the environment, but to support them when they wanted to do it. And because there were some legal questions raised I did send the Attorney General out here.

As you know, I mentioned your school district in the State of the Union Address, and today, just before I came here, I signed an Executive order instructing the Secretary of Education to send to all the school districts in the country this manual that we have just done up on school uniforms—that we're going to send to all the school districts in the country, not to tell them they should do what you have done, but to encourage them if they want to do it and to show them how to do it.

I also wanted to say something else. As I said, I mostly want to listen to you, but I think it's important to point out that if there is a school uniform or a dress code in a school, you not only have the chance of reducing the violence, I also think it sends a different message to the students. When young people are young we should try to teach them to judge themselves and others based on what's inside them, not what's outside them. And in that sense, I think the school uniform policy is as valuable for students from well-to-do families as it is for students from poor families because of the message it sends.

And I'm very—I'm pleased to be here, and I wanted to come here mostly to honor you for your efforts, and hopefully, to publicize your efforts throughout the country. I'm also anxious to hear from the students. I have to tell you I got a lot of hot letters from students—[laughter]—after I bragged on your policy. The mail and the e-mail were burning up—[laughter]—for the next several days.

So why don't we start and just hear from everyone who is here.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:02 a.m. in the library at the Jackie Robinson Academy. In his remarks, he referred to Carl Cohn, superintendent, Long Beach School District.

Memorandum on the School Uniforms Manual

February 24, 1996

Memorandum for the Secretary of Education

Subject: Manual on School Uniforms

Quality education is critical to America's future and the future of our children and

families. We cannot educate our children, however, in schools where weapons, gang violence, and drugs threaten their safety. We must do everything possible to ensure that schools provide a safe and secure environment where the values of discipline, hard work and study, responsibility, and respect can thrive and be passed on to our children. Most schools are safe. But we must have zero tolerance for threats to safety in our schools. It is time to make every school the safest place in its community. Parents should be able to send their children to learn free of fear. All of our schools should be permitted to focus on their original purpose: education.

Many local school districts have made school uniforms an important part of an overall program to improve school safety and discipline. Too often, we learn that students resort to violence and theft simply to obtain designer clothes or fancy sneakers. Too often, we learn that clothing items worn at school, bearing special colors or insignias, are used to identify gang membership or instill fear among students and teachers alike.

If student uniforms can help deter school violence, promote discipline, and foster a better learning environment, then we should offer our strong support to the schools and parents that try them. We should applaud parents, teachers, and school leaders when they take courageous action to make our schools safe and free of gangs, drugs, and violence.

The Long Beach, California, school district recently found that after students started wearing uniforms, there was a substantial decrease in student drug cases, sex offenses, assault and battery cases, and fights. The learning environment improved as teachers could focus more on education and less on discipline. Many other schools—in Baltimore, Cincinnati, Dayton, Detroit, Los Angeles, Miami, Memphis, Milwaukee, Nashville, New Orleans, Phoenix, Seattle, and St. Louis—have also adopted mandatory or voluntary school uniform policies with promising results.

I thus asked you, in consultation with the Attorney General, to develop information about how local school districts have made uniforms part of their school safety and discipline programs. The Department of Edu-

cation, with input from the Department of Justice, has now developed a new "Manual on School Uniforms," which sets forth the benefits of school uniforms; provides a road map for establishing a school uniform policy for schools interested in school uniforms; and describes various model uniform programs from a number of school districts across the Nation.

Because maintaining safe and disciplined schools is an urgent priority in every local community, I today direct you promptly to distribute the Manual on School Uniforms to each of the Nation's 16,000 public school districts. I also direct you to provide copies of the Manual to appropriate organizations representing parents, teachers, and school administrators, and to make it available to interested members of the public.

School uniform programs are just one of the many initiatives undertaken by local school officials and parents to improve school safety and discipline. Other steps—such as truancy reduction programs, student-athlete drug testing, drug and gang prevention initiatives, zero tolerance for weapons, assisting teachers in addressing discipline problems, conflict resolution programs, and character education initiatives—have also been used to improve the education of our children. The Department of Education, in consultation with the Department of Justice, should continue to develop guidance and information about these and other initiatives so that local organizations, families, and educators throughout the Nation have the tools available to make our schools safe, drug-free, and crime-free.

William J. Clinton

Remarks to the Community in Long Beach

February 24, 1996

Thank you very much. Thank you, Melissa Machit. Didn't she do a good job? Give her another hand. [Applause] Mayor O'Neill; Superintendent Cohn; Chief Ellis; our host, the principal, Alexis Ruiz-Alessi, the principal of Jackie Robinson Academy, where we are now. To the president of the board of education, Bobbie Smith, to the JROTC groups